

RELIGION

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among different tribes. In many of the more civilized sections they are no longer carefully observed. Christians do not resort to them. 776
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Sex irregularities are believed to be most abhorrent to the *bg̃ha* and are reputed to have been the cause of most trouble. Among the Bwès they are considered to cause the drying up of land and the failure of crops, and are therefore most severely punished by the elders when discovered. In their primitive state the Karens were unusually free from fornication and adultery. The recent transition period, with the breaking down of old customs and before Western ideals have been established, has seen some relaxation of these conditions. 776
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The old epic song about *Ywa*, the Father God and Creator, and this belief in the existence of God are found among all the tribes. It does not, however, play an important part in their daily lives which are taken up with their struggles with the ever-present *nats* and demons. 771
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Those Karens who were in closest contact with the Burmans, as for example the Pwo Karens, took on a thin veneer of Buddhism and went to the pagodas at the full moon and the quarters, but as a rule it was largely a social conforming that did not have a deep spiritual content. 779
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LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Karen is an agglutinated monosyllabic language belonging to the Sinic family of languages. Like the Chinese it has tones, which are important in learning to speak it, for the same sound may have entirely different 194 ●
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● 194 meanings if spoken in different tones. For example, the
197 syllable *Meh* may mean 'eye', 'sand', 'tail', 'mole' (or the body), or 'tooth', according to the tone in which it is uttered.

538 Originally the Karens had a mass of unwritten bard
173 literature, poems and stories handed down orally and recited around the fireplaces, from generation to generation. Some of these were epic poems which related the history of their race, and others folk stories which they told for amusement and which served to keep alive the traditions of their tribes. Many of these stories were much like the Negro folk tales told in America under the title of "Uncle Remus Stories", or like Grimms' Fairy Tales in Europe. In these Karen folk stories the rabbit figures as the wily one as it does in the Negro tales, and as the fox appears in the European stories.

538 Their epic poems have remarkable accounts of the
773 creation of the world by *Ywa*, who closely resembles the
524 God of the Hebrew Scriptures. They tell of the origin
177 of the human race and the expulsion from a garden, which is similar to the story of Paradise Lost. The poems are in five stress lines and are in couplet form like Hebrew poetry. In their earlier days there use to be rhyming contests or "capping rhymes" as an important part of gatherings such as wedding and funeral feasts. At present they only survive among the most primitive villages away from outside influences.

197 There are many dialects of the Karen language—
212 probably about twenty of them. They fall into six groups: the Sgaw, Pwo, Bwè, Padaung, Karenni and Zayein. The Sgaw and Pwo are the two largest groups. These are the two which have been used in education and in

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which books have been printed. Some of the others, 197
 especially the Bwè, have been reduced to writing, but the 212
 number of those who would use them is so small that it
 has not been considered advisable to develop them.

The Sgaw dialect has, as designed by Western
 scholars, twenty-five consonants which are written on the
 main writing line and seven vowels which are inserted as
 diacritical marks either above or below the line, except
 one which follows the consonant with which it is pro-
 nounced. There are five tonal characters which indicate
 the required inflection. The language is perfectly phonetic.
 Each character has its invariable pronunciation. For
 certain guttural letters and the tones (which are not found
 in the Burmese language) arbitrary adaptations of Burmese
 letters are used. The spelling consists of all the possible
 variations and combinations of consonant, vowel, and
 tone, although not every combination forms a word in
 general usage.

There are several compound consonants in which *g*,
y, *r*, *l* and *w* are combined with other consonants after
 the manner of *c* and *l*, *g* and *y*, etc. in English. There
 are no closed syllables in the Sgaw dialect, every word
 ending in a vowel as in the Hawaiian language. This
 makes it very musical. It has sometimes been called the
 Italian of the Orient.

The Pwo dialect has more nasals and short and sharp 197
 syllables than the Sgaw. It also has some final conso- 194 ●
 nants. In general the construction is not different from
 the Sgaw. An early study of the two dialects showed
 that thirteen-fourteenths of the words in the Sgaw and
 Pwo are from the same roots. It is, however, difficult
 for one who understands only the Sgaw dialect to under-

197 stand, Pwo because of the nasal effect on the pro-
 ● 194 nunciation.

197 The Bwè dialects, spoken near Toungoo in the hills
 177 about Thandaung, have many nasal sounds and somewhat
 resemble the Pwo. Other dialects in the mountains differ
 quite widely from each other but the people in the hills
 speak several of these dialects for there is now much more
 intermingling than there was formerly when feuds kept
 the people apart and made it possible for different dialects
 to grow up even within a few miles of each other.

193 The grammar of the various dialects is not difficult.
 The sentence is formed after the same model as the
 English, with subject, verb, and object. The written and
 spoken language are very similar and direct. There are
 honorifics as in Burmese. There is no sex designation
 in the names of individuals, and so the Karens use *Saw*
 for all men and *Naw* for all women or girls.

212 When Westerners first came into contact with them
 177 the Karens had no written language. But so urgent was
 773 the demand of those who accepted the missionaries as
 797 fulfilling the prophesies uttered by their old poets that
 some day they would be found by the "Younger White
 Brother" who would come across the sea in great ships
 "with white wings" and bring them the Book which their
 ancestors were supposed to have neglected and lost, that
 Dr. Wade, in about 1830, reduced the language of the
 Sgaw dialect to writing. He used the Burmese alphabet,
 for at that time any Karen who knew anything about
 reading could read in the Burmese language of the
 monastery. It was not then foreseen that English and
 the Roman letter would occupy such an important place
 in world affairs as they now enjoy.

193 other language in the world." These paired words, which are called by the Karen "father and mother words," may be parsed separately or together according to their position in the sentence. They may consist of two roots having similar meanings, or of a well-known root together with one which by itself has no meaning now commonly understood. Misapprehension is often avoided by the use of paired words. For example, "ni" (with the circumflex tone) means year, and the same syllable (with the long tone) means day. When this monosyllable is carelessly pronounced, one does not always catch the difference; but "ni-thaw" unmistakably denotes day, because "thaw" is another designation for this period of time; and "ni-la" clearly signifies year, the latter syllable meaning literally month. Such compound words may have compound modifiers which, when used with discrimination, give a pleasing finish to the speech.

197 The Sgaw dialect has six different tones and the Pwo an equal number. The other dialects have various numbers, but not so many and difficult as the tones of the Chinese language.

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194 The Sgaw alphabet consists of twenty-five consonants and ten vowels. One character appears both as a guttural and a consonant. There are no closed syllables in this dialect. The Pwo dialect has three nasal endings which, Dr. Gilmore thinks, are a remnant of the original speech. Evidence in support of this view is supplied by a comparison of the meanings of the single word "hpaw" in Sgaw Karen with the nasal forms expressing the same meanings in Pwo. In the former dialect "hpaw" means one of three things, namely, cook, flower, or granary, while in the latter these meanings require the use of three nasal forms as follows: "hpawn," "hpaw," and "hpan." Other roots from the two dialects show a difference of this sort, indicating that the Sgaw has dropped its original nasals.¹

193 There is no proper relative pronoun in Sgaw. The particle "leu" serves in this capacity, as well as doing duty as quotation marks, a preposition, and a part of every compound preposition, this last form of speech being one of the characteristics of the language. The reflexive use of the pronoun is a notable idiom in the Sgaw. The demonstrative supplies the place of the definite article. A numerical affix or adjective is employed with every numeral. Each of these affixes is supposed to denote the leading characteristic

¹ *Journal, Burma Research Society*, Vol. VIII, Pt. II, pp. 122, 2.